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AUTHOR Honeycutt, James M.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

"Imagined interactions," which refer to a cognitive process whereby individuals imagine themselves having conversations with significant others, captures a dimension of intrapersonal communication barely understood by communication researchers. To examine this multifunctional concept, a study considered the role of "imagined interactions" in message selection and interpretation and in interpersonal relationships. Seventy subjects, students at a large southern university, ranging in age from 17 to 62 with 22 being the mean age, responded to a survey and the UCLA Loneliness Scale. Results indicated that: (1) imagined interactions tend to occur with romantic partners, members of the opposite-sex, and family members; (2) imagined interactions have relational significance; (3) respondents would report that the self talks more than the other in imagined interactions; (4) lonely respondents experienced less communication satisfaction and more negative emotions from their imagined interactions than nonlonely individuals; (5) many of imagined interaction topics are concerned with issues in opposite-sex relationships; and (6) imagined interactions occurred regularly with intimate partners. (Fifteen tables of data are included, and 39 references are appended.) (MS)

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Intrapersonal Communication and Imagined Interactions

James M. Honeycutt*

Kenneth S. Zagacki

Renee Edwards

Department of Speech Communication

Louisiana State University

Baton Rouge, LA 70803-3923

(504) 388-4172

* Authors are listed in an arbitrary order. All contributed equally to the project.

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Abstract

The notion of "imagined interactions" is introduced as a type of intrapersonal communication. Imagined interaction refers to a cognitive process whereby individuals imagine themselves having conversations with significant others. Imagined interactions may occur before or after actual encounters. It is suggested that imagined interactions are multifunctional. Major functions include rehearsing for anticipated encounters, enhancing confidence in evaluative situations, and relieving tension. Results of a study indicate that imagined interactions tend to occur with romantic partners, members of the opposite-sex, and family members. Topics of discussion involve relational issues. These topics tended to be equally pleasant and unpleasant. In addition, results suggested that imagined interactions may be dysfunctional for lonely individuals. Findings are discussed in terms of five hypotheses and implications for future studies are evaluated.

Intrapersonal Communication and Imagined Interactions

An assumption guiding much communication research is that communication behavior is accompanied by social cognition. It is clear, for example, that social actors focus on and organize ongoing communicative interaction (Duval and Wicklund, 1972; Turner, 1978; Snyder, 1974, 1979; Taylor and Fiske, 1978). Likewise, communicators appear to actively construct their realities by employing cognitive attitude structures (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), implicit theories (Heider, 1958; Kelly, 1955; Schutz, 1932; Piaget, 1932, Wegner & Vallacher, 1977; Jones & Davis, 1965), and cognitive scripts/schemas (Schank & Abelson, 1977; Tesser, 1978; Tversky & Kahneman, 1980; Shweder, 1975). Researchers have also explored how communicators monitor various situational stimuli, matching message strategies to situational constraints prior to message sending. Sillars (1980), for instance, found that college roommates who were videotaped discussing issues potentially affecting their relationship based their choice of appropriate interpersonal messages on the perceived linkage between situational factors and their goals and interpretations. Similarly, McLaughlin, Cody and O'Hair (1983) examined communicators' abilities to match accounts for failure to situational exigencies. Other researchers have explored the role of social cognition during deception (Greene, O'Hair, Cody,

& Yen, 1985), initial interaction (Douglas 1983), persuasion (Smith, 1983) and group decision-making (Poole, 1983).

While this research has added to our general understanding of social cognition and its relationship to message production, interpretation and storage, little is known about the relationship between social cognition and message rehearsal and review. Indeed, many studies rely on computer analogies to conceptualize message selection and interpretation. When confronted with communication situations, actors scan available "cognitive schemata" for information about how to best achieve their purposes within these situations. Actors identify goals and constraints and decide upon alternative message strategies best adapted to these goals and constraints. The present article attempts to extend current thinking by considering the role of "imagined interactions" in (1) message selection and interpretation, and (2) in interpersonal relationships. We suggest that the concept of imagined interactions captures a dimension of "intrapersonal" communication barely understood by communication researchers. Further, we report the results of a study that indicates the prevalence of imagined interactions and relates them to various communicative functions.

Imagined Interactions and Intrapersonal Communication

The notion of imagined interactions is derived from work in intrapersonal communication and symbolic interaction. Wenberg and Wilmot (1973) claim that "Ultimately, all communication

responses take place within a person as he reacts to various communication cues . . . intrapersonal communication provides the basis for all other communication arenas" (p. 21). They suggest that "Intrapersonal communication is the communication with oneself. Within this arena, one receives signals that characterize one's own feelings or sensations" (p. 20). Likewise, Brooks (1978) describes intrapersonal communication as "the level upon which an individual 'talks to himself' and thus handles events, ideas and experiences" (p. 13). Roloff and Berger (1982) add that intrapersonal communication, like social cognition, involves the use of representational systems, focuses on certain aspects of interaction (e.g., self, others, or behaviors), and has some impact on behavior.

Communication scholars have described intrapersonal communication as what Mead (1934) called the "internalized conversation of gestures" (p. 173). Mead cited an individual's ability to monitor social action as a distinguishing mark of human intelligence. He showed that individuals can have present, "in terms of attitudes or implicit responses, the alternative possible overt completions of any given act in which we are involved" (p. 117). The individual can "test out implicitly the various possible completions of an already initiated act in advance of actual completion of the act," and thus choose "the one which it is most desirable to perform explicitly or carry into overt effect" (p. 117). This process pertains, in part, to

what Mead called the individual's internal conversation with him/herself. These internal dialogues could involve taking the role of others to see ourselves as others see us. As Mead (1934) illustrates, "One separates the significance of what he is saying to other from the actual speech and gets it ready before saying it. He thinks it out, and perhaps writes it in the form of a book" (p. 118). This sort of pre-communicative mental activity, explain Manis and Meltzer (1978), "is a peculiar type of activity that goes on in the experience of the person. The activity is that of the person responding to himself, of indicating things to himself" (p. 21). Mead adds that such activity is essential to the constitution of the self: "That the person should be responding to himself is necessary to the self, and it is this sort of social conduct which provides behavior within which that self appears" (p. 118). What is important about this type of mental activity is that (1) one may consciously take the role of others, imagining how they might respond to one's messages within particular situations, and thus (2) one can test and imagine the consequences of alternative messages prior to communication.

Rosenblatt and Meyer (1986) have applied Mead's notion to counseling situations. They posit the existence of imagined interactions, suggesting that they "may occur in self-controlled daydreams, or they may occur as the mind wanders" (p. 319). Imagined interactions may possess many of the traits of real conversations: they may be fragmentary, extended, rambling,

repetitive, or coherent. Actors within imagined interactions may control conversations or relinquish control to imagined others. Imagined interactions occur frequently during the course of an actor's day. Most involve actors in conversation with significant others, such as family members, close friends, intimates, or work partners.

Rosenblatt and Meyer fail to conceptualize adequately their notion of imagined interaction. We suggest that imagined interactions refer to a process of social cognition whereby actors imagine themselves in interaction with others. Imagined interactions may precede, follow, or even help constitute the decision-making process. Brook's notion that intrapersonal communication involves "talking" to oneself is important, for not only do individuals talk to themselves, but during imagined interactions they talk to others as well. Thus, we surmise that imagined interactions are an extended form of intrapersonal communication.

A distinction must be made between cognitive decision-making and imagined interactions. Cognitive decision-making refers to the process whereby actors examine cognitive schemata for appropriate message behaviors. Imagined interactions are in principle different from decision-making processes insofar as they involve the actor in imagined dialogue with anticipated others. Imagined interactions are attempts to simulate real-life conversations with significant others. One can actually envision

participation in discourse with others, anticipate their response, and even assume their roles. Although imagined interactions may not picture fully the context of actual (or recalled) conversation, we believe individuals can accurately represent many of the physical and socio-emotional elements which are a part of real interaction. There are, however, instances where real encounters radically depart from their imagined predecessors. Thus, imagined interactions should be conceived as an extension of intrapersonal communication and as a specific type of social cognition in which communicators experience cognitive representations of conversation with its accompanying verbal and nonverbal features. In the parlence of cognitive theorists, imagined interactions are perhaps best related to what Greene (1984) calls "procedural records" -- cognitive structures which provide cues for rehearsing and/or reviewing interaction.

General Functions of Imagined Interactions

Imagined interactions may achieve the general function of developing cognitive scripts. Kellerman (1984) has argued that the method by which cognitive scripts are acquired has received little attention. We suggest that individuals develop scripts partially through imagined interactions. Like scripts, imagined interactions may be abstractions of an ongoing stream of behavior to which central tendencies are extracted and stored. These interactions may not be accurate renderings of real conversation. They may be both functional and dysfunctional. Nevertheless,

engaging in imagined interactions may help assemble information for later script development or alteration.

Imagined interactions are probabably similar to what Abelson (1976) calls collections of "vignettes," or representations of events of short duration, "much like a panel in a cartoon strip where a visual image is accompanied by a verbal caption" (Kellerman, p. 3). A coherent collection of vignettes forms a script, "much as the panels of a cartoon strip form a story" (Kellerman, 1984, p. 3). As one engages in imagined interaction, a series of turn-taking or topic changes may correspond to panel (vignette) changes. An imagined interaction may progress like a cartoon, in logical sequence from one topic to the next. Like the cartoon reader, an individual having an imagined interaction is afforded the luxury of moving back and forth over the panel, even "rewriting" the strip if appropriate. Coherent imagined interactions may form cognitive scripts; incoherent imagined interactions may form partial or inchoate scripts.

The analogy to cartoon strips is important to understanding imagined interactions. For like these strips, imagined interactions may be visual and verbal. Moreover, interactants may possess, like cartoon characters, extraordinary powers of conversational control (e.g., prediction, mind-reading, time-travel, pause, and so on) not afforded real-life interlocuters.

Greene (1984) argues that much cognitive research assumes that cognitive systems have developed to facilitate action (see also Norman, 1980), and that the functions of cognitive systems are best understood in terms of their implications for action (Greene, 1984). In other words, cognitive systems possess mechanisms allowing individuals to plan interpersonal communication and to guage the effects of this communication. Imagined interactions may function as one such cognitive mechanism.

For methodological reasons, Greene eschews the terminology related to cognitive schema theory, replacing it with the notion of "procedural records." A procedural record is defined as "a modular entity containing a specification for action and an outcome associated with that action" (p. 294). These records provide functional information about engaging different aspects of interpersonal communication. Like cognitive schemata and scripts, it is possible that imagined interactions activate, and possibly constitute, procedural records for coping with specific interpersonal communication situations.

Imagined interactions may function more subtly to assist the construction of social reality. Citing Berger and Luckman (1966), Caughey (1984) contends that by rehearsing anticipated conversations, "we also bind ourselves tightly within a given culturally constructed framework. These inner conversations may be just as important as actual conversations" in managing our

sense of social reality. (p. 146). Imagined interactions may be related to the social construction of reality in at least two other ways: First, rehearsing expected interactions reaffirms what one believes to be a particular state of affairs in a relationship. Second, they allow one to test a given stock of relational knowledge against what one anticipates might transpire in real conversation. For example, a person may believe his/her relational partner to be relatively trustworthy. Faced with a situation where he/she must disclose confidential information, the individual may "test" various disclosive strategies and "imagine" their effects on the partner. Each strategy will be measured against what the person "knows" about the partner's relative trustworthiness.

Thus, like cognitive schemata, imagined interactions organize and interpret symbolic stimuli from the external environment. They provide individuals with information about the "world". But manifesting themselves as they do in the flow of consciousness, imagined interactions represent one's perceptions of the social world in ways qualitatively different from current notions of cognitive schemas and intrapersonal communication. Imagined interactions, in other words, provide individuals with animated and visual as well as verbal representations of one's relational environment.

Hypotheses

Edwards, Honeycutt and Zagacki (1987) have conducted the only empirical study of imagined interactions. They found that individuals report their imagined interactions to be pleasant; they also report that self talks more than other during imagined interaction. In addition, imagined interactions may be more dysfunctional for lonely individuals. That is, the more lonely an individual, the greater the discrepancy between his/her reported imagined interaction and the actual encounter. On the basis of these findings we posit the following hypotheses:

H1: Individuals will report their imagined interactions are more pleasant than unpleasant.

H2: Individuals will report that the self talks more than the other.

H3: Imagined interactions will differ as a function of loneliness.

Duck (1980) has recommended that interpersonal research should move beyond overt relational encounters to consider the ways in which individuals covertly maintain relationships. For example, researchers should examine the time interactants "spend alone 'replaying' relational events, analyzing future encounters, even fantasising about likely or possible (or impossible) futures for the relationship" (Duck, p. 118). We suggest that imagined interactions may be a part of this covert process of relational maintenance. We share with Duck the belief that the many important determinants of relational development occur outside immediate conversation--they occur in the cognitive domain of

imagined interactions. If this is true, then we can expect imagined interactions to occur with topics dealing with relational events or issues. Similarly, we expect that many imagined interactions will occur with relational partners. On this basis, the following hypotheses are generated:

H4: Individuals will report that many of their imagined interaction topics deal with relational issues.

H5: Individuals will report that many of their imagined interactions occur with relational partners.

Methods and Procedures

Instrumentation

Subjects completed the Survey of Imagined Interaction. The instrument consists of two sections; this report focuses on results of the second section. [Section 1 consists of a 21 item survey on experiences with imagined interactions (see Edwards, et al., 1987).] Section 2 consists primarily of a series of open-ended questions about imagined interactions. First, subjects listed general topics of their imagined interactions. Next they listed the general relational partners with whom they imagine interactions. Then they were told to think of an imagined interaction they had experienced, to indicate the topic, the relational partner, and to identify when they had experienced it. Subjects were instructed to reconstruct the imagined interaction they recalled, and write out sample lines of dialogue from it. They were asked to list the emotions they experienced from the interaction and they completed 10 closed-ended items which

measured satisfaction with the imagined interaction. The 10 items were adapted from Hecht's Communication Satisfaction Inventory (1978).

Administration

The Survey of Imagined Interaction was administered to several sections of an introductory course in interpersonal communication at a large southern university. All participation was voluntary. Some respondents completed the instrument during class time, while others did not. Some received class credit for participating while others did not.

Respondents to the survey also completed the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau & Cutrona, 1980) within several days of responding to the survey of imagined interaction. This instrument was voluntary and was completed during class time; no participants received class credit.

Subjects

A total of 70 subjects responded to both instruments. Subjects ranged in age from 17 to 62 with 22 being the mean age. The sample consisted of 48 percent males and 52 percent females.

Content Analysis

All responses to the open-ended questions in the Survey of Imagined Interaction had to be content analyzed for data analysis. Two undergraduate coders assisted with category development and coded the data. Categories for each open-ended question were created by transferring approximately 50% of the

items onto notecards. The coders individually sorted the cards into stacks; then worked together to integrate their category systems. The systems are assumed to be valid for two reasons: first, they are based directly on the data provided by subjects. Second, the coders were similar to the subjects and should have comparable cognitive structures.

Seventeen different variables were coded from the data:

1. General Topics. Subjects listed topics they discuss in their imagined interactions. They were coded into 11 categories: conflicts/problems, dating, school/class, work/job, activities, family, money, friends, ex-partners, small talk, and miscellaneous.

2. General II Partners. Subjects listed the relational partners with whom they have imagined interactions. Responses were coded into 10 categores: romantic partner, family member, friends, work related, roommate, authority figures, ex-partners, strangers, prosective partners/acquaintances, and miscellaneous.

3. Dialogue Partner. Subjects were asked to identify the partner with whom they had the imagined interaction which they report. Dialogue partner was coded into the same categories as General II Partner.

4. Recency. Subjects indicated when they had their imagined interaction. Responses were coded into 5 categories: today, yesterday, up to 1 week ago, up to 2 weeks ago, over 2 weeks ago.

5. Location. Subjects identified where they had their imagined interaction. Responses were coded into 7 categories: respondent's home, partner's home, in bed, on the phone, public place, work setting, and miscellaneous.

6. Reported Topic. Subjects listed the topics they discussed in their dialogue protocols. Responses were coded into the same 11 categories as General Topics.

7. & 8. First Line and Last Line. Coders identified whether the first and last lines provided in the dialogue protocol were spoken by the respondent (Self) or interaction partner (Other).

9. & 10. Self Lines and Other Lines. Coders counted the number of lines of dialogue spoken by the respondent (Self) and the dialogue partner (Other).

11. & 12. Self Words and Other Words. Coders counted the number of words spoken by the repondent (Self) and dialogue partner (Other).

13. & 14. Self Questions and Other Questions. Coders counted the number of questions for each interactant.

15. Emotional Level. Coders described the level of emotional arousal within the dialogue protocols, coding it into three levels: strong, medium, and neutral.

16. Observed topics. Coders categorized the topics they observed in the dialogue protocols, and coded them into the same categories as for General Topics.

17. Reported emotion. Subjects were asked to list the emotions they felt concerning the imagined interactions they provided. Responses were coded into three categories: negative, positive, and mixed. Mixed responses occurred when respondents provided both positive and negative emotions.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by providing frequencies for the responses to the open ended questions, by crosstabulating responses and computing Chi squares, by computing Pearson product moment correlations to test for associations between some interval measurements, and by computing t-tests for comparisons between groups and variables. Criterion alpha was .05.

Results

Coder reliablity was good. Both assistants coded approximately 15% of the total responses to test reliability. Scott's pi (a conservative test of reliability) was computed for the coding data. Reliability (Scott's pi) was .84 for topics; .94 for relationships; .44 for recency; .79 for location; .90 for first line; 1.00 for last line; and .70 for emotions reported.

Correlations were computed for the counting and rating data. Reliability was .92 for self lines; 1.0 for other lines; .99 for self words; 1.0 for other words; 1.0 for selff questions; 1.0 for other questions; and .85 for emotional level.

Reliability checks were also performed after the coding was concluding. All estimates were comparable to the initial

coefficients.

Reliability was also computed for the measure of communication satisfaction (Cronback's alpha = .89) and the UCLA loneliness scale (Cronback's alpha = .88). These variables were dichotomized for some of the analyses.

The results will be presented in two sections. The first section provides the frequencies for several variables, and the second section addresses the hypotheses.

Frequencies

General Topics. Table 1 lists the frequencies of the general topics of imagined interactions. The most commonly occurring opic concerns dating and opposite sex relationships, followed rather distantly by conflicts/problems and work/job/career topics.

General II Partners. Table 2 lists the frequencies for the relational partners in imagined interactions. Romantic partners are the most common, followed by family members and friends. Ex-partners, seldem mentioned in other research in communication, were reported by 16% of all respondents.

Dialogue Partner. The most common partners for the dialogue protocols provided by subjects were romantic partners and friends (see Table 3).

Recency. Most imagined interactions had occurred within the past week or yesterday (see Table 4).

Location. Almost half of the imagined interactions occurred in the respondents' home, apartment or room (see Table 5).

Reported Topics. The most commonly reported topic for the dialogue provided was dating, followed by conflicts/problems (See Table 6).

First Line and Last Line. The self initiated the dialogues over twice as often as the other, and ended them about half the time (see Tables 7 & 8).

Self Lines and Other Lines. The self spoke an average of 2.8 lines; the other spoke 2.6 (see Table 9).

Self Words and Other Words. The self spoke an average of 44 words per dialogue; the other spoke 27 words (see Table 9).

Self Questions and Other Questions. The self and other each asked an average of .7 questions per dialogue (see Table 9).

Emotional Level. Over half the time, the emotional level of the dialogues was strong (see Table 10).

Observed Topics. The most commonly observed topics (observed within the dialogue by the coders as opposed to reported a priori by the respondents) were dating and conflicts/problems (see Table 11)

Reported Emotion. Positive and negative emotions were reported fairly equally; mixed emotions were reported in 19% of the cases (see Table 12).

Hypotheses/Research Questions Answered

Based on previous research and theory, we posed several hpotheses. Several analyses addressed these issues.

The first hypothesis predicted that imagined interactions would be more positive than negative. This prediction is not confirmed. Respondents reported about the same number of positive and negative emotions (see Table 12). A chi square test comparing frequency of negative and positive emotions revealed no significant difference.

The second hypothesis predicted that the self would talk more than the other in the imagined interactions. This hypothesis is confirmed. T-tests (see Table 13) revealed that the self spoke more words and more lines than did the other. In addition, the self is significantly more likely to initiate the dialogue in an imagined interaction (see Table 7). A chi square produced a value of 8.02 (df = 1); probability is less than .01.

The third hypothesis predicted that lonely individuals would differ from non-lonely individuals in their imagined interactions. This prediction is partially supported. There was no difference between the two groups in their level of verbage (self lines, other lines, self words or other words). However, loneliness is significantly negatively correlated with satisfaction with the imagined interaction dialogue ($r = -.36$; $p = .004$). When lonliness is dichotomized, lonely and nonlonely groups differ significantly in their reported emotions (see Table

14). A Chi square test was computed on the crosstabulation of lonliness and emotion using only the negative and positive emotions; chi square = 7.57 (df = 1), probability is less than .01. Lonely and non-lonely groups also differ significantly in their level of satisfaction (see Table 15). Lonely individuals experience less satisfaction and more negative emotions with their imagined interactions than do non-lonely individuals.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that most of the dialogues would concern relational issues and topics. Approximately 59% of the reported topics concerned dating, conflicts/problems in relationships, family, friends, and ex-partners; 41% concerned school, work, activities, money, small talk, and miscellaneous. A chi square test provided a value of 3.25 (df = 1); probability is less than .10, but greater than .05.

The fifth hypothesis predicted that most of the dialogue partners would be relational partners. This received strong support. Approximately 75% of the dialogue partners were romantic partners, family members, friends and roommates, while only 29% were work related, people in authority, ex-partners, strangers or prospective relational partners. A chi square test resulted in a value of 12.8; probability is less than .001.

Discussion

The results of this study reveal that imagined interactions have relational significance. The topics of imagined interactions are generally concerned with dating and with issues

arising in relationships such as conflict. The relational emphasis is important enough that some imagined interactions review past relational episodes; others explore prospective relationships.

Hypothesis one predicted that imagined interactions would be more positive than negative. This prediction was not supported. There were equal numbers of positive and negative emotions reported. The occurrance of negative emotions might be explained by Knapp's (1984) theory of relational development. He proposes that deterioriating relationships pass through a stagnation phase in which partners merely mark time and do not attempt to resolve relational issues. The stage is characterized by the theme that "there is little sense bringing anything up because I know what will happen, and it won't be particularly pleasant" (Knapp, 1984, p. 42). Knapp speculates that during the stagnation stage, partners have <u>covert</u> dialogues with their partners about relational issues. Since these covert dialogues focus on the negative features of the relationship, the emotions which accompany them might be negative as well.

Positive emotions may be attributed to the natural excitement that accompanies relational initiation and growth. Individuals imagine pleasant activities with relational partners, such as engaging in small talk, planning dates, and discussing shared interests. In addition, imagined interactions tend to take place with significant others. Therefore, we would expect

that these interactions would be satisfying. Finally, it is possible that pleasantness is associated with conversational control. Because indivdiuals tend to control their imagined interactions, they are more able to accomplish satisfactorily their communicative goals within them.

Hypothesis two posited that respondents would report that the self talks more than the other in imagined interactions. This hypothesis was supported and suggests that the self dominates imagined interactions, a finding consistent with literature on attribution theory. Attribution theorists have examined the fundamental attribution error in which there are are actor-observor differences in accounting for the cause of behavior (Nisbett & Ross, 1979; Ross, 1977; Kelley & Michella, 1980). Research indicates that information about self is more available than information about others, and that the self is relatively unable to take the perspectives of others. Thus, individuals process primarily their own role and thoughts in imagined interactions and not the roles and thoughts of others.

The third hypothesis received partial support. This hypothesis was nondirectional and posited that lonely individuals would differ from non-lonely individuals in their reports of imagined interaction. There was no difference between levels of loneliness and amount of verbage observed in the imagined interactions. However, lonely respondents experienced less communication satisfaction and more negative emotions from their

imagined interactions than nonlonely individuals. This supports earlier findings of Edwards et al. (1987) that imagined interactions may be dysfunctional for lonely individuals. They found that lonely individuals report that imagined interactions are less useful for preparing for actual interactions than do non-lonely individuals.

The coding of the topics of imagined interactions provided moderate support for the fourth hypothesis. This hypothesis posited that individuals would report that many of their imagined interaction topics are concerned with issues in opposite-sex relationships. Given that the sample was college aged and presumably in an environment where social relationships are encouraged, it is not surprising that their thoughts are preoccupied with the opposite sex and with dating. Research on other populations of subjects may reveal a greater variety of topics addressed in imagined interactions.

Related to relational topics, the fifth hypothesis predicted that imagined interactions would occur regularly with intimate partners. This prediction was supported. Imagined interactions tended to be with romantic partners, followed by family members, and more frequently with known relational partners than with unknown individuals. Thus, they occur with significant others rather than with acquaintances or strangers. Our data offer support for Duck's (1980) speculation than individuals spend time alone replaying relational events, analyzing future encounters

and even fantasizing about potential outcomes for a given relationship.

Implications and Directions for Future Research

Imagined interactions, at least among college students, occur with regularity (Edwards et al., 1987). This study found that topics concerning relational issues are common. Not surprisingly, imagined interactions occur primarily with romantic partners. This is important because it means that "covert dialogues" (Knapp, 1984) occur in more than just the stagnation stage of relationships. Our results reveal that they occur before initial contact is made, such as when an individual imagines asking (or being asked) for a date. Imagined interactions also occur with ex-partners. For example, one female reported an imagined interaction with an ex-lover who terminated the relationship. He apologized for the hurt he caused and says how wrong he was to let her go. She responded that she hated him and that she was better off with her present boyfriend. This is an example of imagined interactions occurring in what might be referred to as the "11th" interaction stage--post-termination awareness of an ex-partner through imagined interactions. Imagined interactions may be used to reinterpret past relational episodes as well as to prepare for future encounters through a rehearsal function (Edwards et al., 1987).

The social experiences of the respondents in this study may limit generalizability to other populations of relational

partners. This is predicated on the assumption that college sophomores are in learning experiences with the opposite sex. Contrast this with a married population who may have more experiences to draw on. We may expect that positive emotions for imagined interactions are associated with more happily married spouses compared to less happy marriages. Research to test these and related questions is currently underway.

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Table 1

Frequencies of General Topics of Imagined Interactions

GROUP GENTOPS GENERAL II TOPICS

CATEGORY LABEL	CODE	COUNT	PCT OF RESPONSES	PCT OF CASES
CONFLICTS/PROBLEMS	1	28	14.4	40.0
DATING	2	43	22.1	61.4
SCHOOL	3	20	10.3	28.6
WORK/JOB	4	25	12.8	35.7
ACTIVITIES	5	23	11.8	32.9
FAMILY/HOME	6	10	5.1	14.3
MONEY	7	6	3.1	8.6
FRIENDS	8	16	8.2	22.9
EX-PARTNERS	9	2	1.0	2.9
SMALL TALK	10	4	2.1	5.7
MISCELLANEOUS	11	18	9.2	25.7
TOTAL RESPONSES		195	100.0	278.6

0 MISSING CASES 70 VALID CASES

Table 2

Frequencies of General Imagined Interaction Partners

GROUP GENRELS GENERAL 11 PARTNERS

CATEGORY LABEL	CODE	COUNT	PCT OF RESPONSES	PCT OF CASES
ROMANTIC PARTNER	1	44	31.9	63.8
FAMILY MEMBER	2	25	18.1	36.2
FRIENDS	3	24	17.4	34.8
WORK/JOB RELATED	4	9	6.5	13.0
ROOMMATES	5	6	4.3	8.7
PEOPLE IN AUTHORITY	6	8	5.8	11.6
EX-PARTNERS	7	11	8.0	15.9
STRANGERS	8	2	1.4	2.9
PROSPECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS	9	5	3.6	7.2
MISCELLANEOUS	10	4	2.9	5.8
TOTAL RESPONSES		135	100.0	200.0

1 MISSING CASES 89 VALID CASES

Table 3

Frequencies of Dialogue Partners

GROUP RELS DIALOGUE PARTNER

CATEGORY LABEL	CODE	COUNT	PCT OF RESPONSES	PCT OF CASES
ROMANTIC PARTNER	1	24	32.0	35.8
FAMILY MEMBER	2	9	12.0	13.4
FRIENDS	3	16	21.3	23.9
WORK/JOB RELATED	4	7	9.3	10.4
ROOMMATES	5	4	5.3	6.0
PEOPLE IN AUTHORITY	6	3	4.0	4.5
EX-PARTNERS	7	6	8.0	9.0
STRANGERS	8	2	2.7	3.0
PROSPECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS	9	4	5.3	6.0
TOTAL RESPONSES		75	100.0	111.9

3 MISSING CASES 67 VALID CASES

Table 4

Recency of Imagined Interactions

VARIABLE REC

CATEGORY LABEL	CODE	COUNT	PCT OF RESPONSES
TODAY	1	7	10.8
YESTERDAY	2	19	29.2
WITHIN THE WEEK	3	29	44.6
UP TO 2 WEEKS AGO	4	7	10.8
OVER TWO WEEKS AGO	5	3	4.6
	TOTAL RESPONSES	65	100.0

5 MISSING CASES 65 VALID CASES

Table 5

Location of Imagined Interactions

VARIABLE LOC

CATEGORY LABEL	CODE	COUNT	PCT OF RESPONSES
OWN HOME	1	30	45.5
PARTNER HOME	2	3	4.5
IN BED	3	6	9.1
ON THE PHONE	4	6	9.1
PUBLIC PLACE	5	7	10.6
WORK SETTING	6	7	10.6
MISCELLANEOUS	7	7	10.6
	TOTAL RESPONSES		

4 MISSING CASES 66 VALID CASES

Table 6

Reported Topics of Imagined Interactions

GROUP RPTOPS REPORTED 11 TOPICS

CATEGORY LABEL	CODE	COUNT	PCT OF RESPONSES	PCT OF CASES
CONFLICTS/PROBLEMS	1	19	17.1	28.8
DATING	2	30	27.0	45.5
SCHOOL	3	8	7.2	12.1
WORK/JOB	4	10	9.0	15.2
ACTIVITIES	5	13	11.7	19.7
FAMILY/HOME	6	2	1.8	3.0
MONEY	7	1	0.9	1.5
FRIENDS	8	9	8.1	13.6
EX-PARTNERS	9	5	4.5	7.6
SMALL TALK	10	6	5.4	9.1
MISCELLANEOUS	11	8	7.2	12.1
	TOTAL RESPONSES	111	100.0	168.2

4 MISSING CASES 66 VALID CASES

Table 7

Source of First Line of Dialogue

VARIABLE First Line

CATEGORY LABEL	CODE	COUNT	PCT OF RESPONSES
SELF	1	38	69.1
OTHER	2	17	30.9
	TOTAL RESPONSES		

15 MISSING CASES 55 VALID CASES

Table 8

Source of Last Line of Dialogue

VARIABLE Last Line

CATEGORY LABEL	CODE	COUNT	PCT OF RESPONSES
SELF	1	25	45.5
OTHER	2	30	54.5
	TOTAL RESPONSES		

15 MISSING CASES 55 VALID CASES

Table 9

Frequencies of Self Words, Other Words, Self Lines, Other Lines, Self Questions and Other Questions

NUMBER OF VALID OBSERVATIONS (LISTWISE) = 41.00

VARIABLE	MEAN	STD DEV	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	VALID N
IISAT	46.877	11.653	24.00	70.00	65
SELFLI	2.764	1.319	1	6	55
OTHLI	2.564	1.316	1	6	55
SELFWO	43.491	33.066	4	186	55
OTHWO	27.327	20.549	1	97	55
SELFFQU	.873	1.072	0	5	55
OTHQU	.873	1.072	0	5	55
UCLALS	46.649	13.971	23.00	91.00	57

Table 10

Emotional level of the Dialogues

VARIABLE EMOLEY

CATEGORY LABEL	CODE	COUNT	PCT OF RESPONSES
STRONG	1	34	55.7
MEDIUM	2	12	19.7
NEUTRAL	3	15	24.6
	TOTAL RESPONSES		

9 MISSING CASES 61 VALID CASES

Table 11

Observed Dialogue Topics

GROUP UBSTOP OBSERVED 11 TOPICS

CATEGORY LABEL	CODE	COUNT	PCT OF RESPONSES	PCT OF CASES
CONFLICTS/PROBLEMS	1	20	22.2	32.3
DATING	2	23	25.6	37.1
SCHOOL	3	7	7.8	11.3
WORK/JOB	4	9	10.0	14.5
ACTIVITIES	5	11	12.2	17.7
FAMILY/HOME	6	2	2.2	3.2
MONEY	7	1	1.1	1.6
FRIENDS	8	7	7.8	11.3
SMALL TALK	10	6	6.7	9.7
MISCELLANEOUS	11	4	4.4	6.5
	TOTAL RESPONSES			

8 MISSING CASES 62 VALID CASES

Table 12

Reported Imagined Interaction Emotions

GROUP EMORPT REPORTED 11 EMOTION

CATEGORY LABEL	CODE	COUNT	PCT OF RESPONSES	PCT OF CASES
NEGATIVE	1	21	41.2	50.0
POSITIVE	2	22	43.1	52.4
MIXED	5	8	15.7	19.0
	TOTAL RESPONSES			

28 MISSING CASES 42 VALID CASES

Table 13

I-Test Comparing Self-Talk and Other Talk

VARIABLE	NUMBER OF CASES	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	T VALUE	DEGREES OF FREEDOM	2-TAIL PROB.
SELFWO	55	43.4909	33.066	3.42	54	0.001
OTHWO		27.3273	20.549			
SELFLI	55	2.7636	1.319	2.11	54	0.040
OTHLI		2.5636	1.316			

Table 14

Reported Emotions by lonely and Non-lonely Individuals

* * * * C R O S S T A B U L A T I O N * * * *

LONLI
BY EMORPT (GROUP) REPORTED II EMOTION

COUNT		EMORPT NEGATIVE	POSITIVE	MIXED	ROW TOTAL
LONLI		1	2	5	
NON-LONELY	1	6	11	3	16 45.7
LONELY	2	13	6	4	19 54.3
	COLUMN TOTAL	19 54.3	17 48.6	7 20.0	35 100.00

PERCENTS AND TOTALS BASED ON RESPONDENTS

35 VALID CASES 35 MISSING CASES

Table 15

T-Test Comparing Satisfaction with Dialogue Between Lonely and Non-Lonely Individuals.

VARIANCE	NUMBER OF CASES	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	SEPARATE VARIANCE EST. T VALUE	DEGREES OF FREEDOM	2-TAIL PROB.
IISAT						
Non-lonely	25	51.3200	10.609	3.39	49.95	0.001
Lonely	28	41.5714	10.301			